



A COMPENDIUM OF RIVERS

STEPHEN MORRISSEY

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PRESS



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"... how lovely are rivers; there isn't only one sacred river,
all rivers throughout the world have their own divinity ..."
—J. Krishnamurti, 1987

"No man ever steps in the same river twice, for it's not the same river
and he's not the same man."
—Heraclitus, quoted in Plato, Cratylus, 402a

A COMPENDIUM OF RIVERS

For the seven lakes, and by no man these verses:
Rain; empty river; a voyage,
Fire from frozen cloud, heavy rain in the twilight
Under the cabin roof was one lantern.
The reeds are heavy; bent;
And the bamboos speak as if weeping.

—Ezra Pound, "Canto 49"

O well remembered rivers that sing of long ago,
Ajourneying through summer or dreaming under snow.

—Bliss Carman, "Rivers of Canada"

It was late, late in the evening,
The lovers they were gone;
The clocks had ceased their chiming,
And the deep river ran on.

—W.H. Auden, "As I walked Out One Evening"

Flow on, river! flow with the flood-tide, and ebb with the ebb-tide!
Frolic on, crested and scallop-edg'd waves!
Gorgeous clouds of the sunset! drench with your splendor me,
or the men and women generations after me!

—Walt Whitman, "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"

Sometimes I live in the country,
sometimes I live in town
Sometimes I take a great notion,
to jump in the river and drown.

—Lead Belly, "Goodnight Irene"

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion.

—Psalm 137:1

Charon, indeed, your dreaded oar,
With what a peaceful sound it dips
Into the stream; how gently, too,
From the wet blade the water drips.

—Edna St. Vincent Millay,
"Sappho Crosses the Dark River into Hades"

with the roar of the river
forever in our ears (arrear)
inducing sleep and silence the roar
of eternal sleep . . . challenging
our waking—

—William Carlos Williams, *Paterson*, Book One

This is not yet the sea, it is the river.

—Dudek, *Europe*, Poem 2

The company had advertised for men to unload a steamer across the
River. It was six o'clock in the morning, snowing, and still dark.
There was a crowd looking for work on the dock;
and all the while men hurried to the dock.

—Charles Reznikoff, "Testimony"

Crossing the river 'where the fish play east of
the lotus leaves' strewn with a coverlet of flowers,
reciting our poems to a lute,
we slept in the same bed,
brothers in poetry.

—Nellie McClung, "Tu Fu (712-770)"

Tug against the river—
Motor turning, lights
In the fast water off the bow-water:
Passes slowly.

—George Oppen, "Discrete Series 1929-1933"

the river water bathed its bed so long
that even the light glides over the smooth wave

—Tristan Tzara, "The Approximate Man"

And the muddy waters of the Amur carrying along millions of corpses
In every station I watched the last trains leave
That's all: they weren't selling any more tickets
And the soldiers would far rather have stayed. . .

—Blaise Cendrars, "The Prose of the Trans-Siberian..."

Like a strong, phallic god
you swim naked in the river,
in moonlight drawing your lover
down below the surface,
below and below and below
the waters of consciousness.

—Carolyn Zonailo, "Like a River God"

Now you say you're lonely
You cried the long night through
Well, you can cry me a river, cry me a river
I cried a river over you

—Arthur Hamilton, "Cry Me a River"

Waking at times in the night she found assurance
In his regular breathing but wondered whether
It was really worth it and where
The river had flowed away
And where were the white flowers.

—Louis MacNeice, "Les Sylphides"

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down,
yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

—The Bible, King James version, Psalm 137

A mighty river,
a river of fire,
was flowing
under the universe

—Doukhobor *Book of Life*, # 386

Oh, rivers rolling to the sea
From lands that bear the maple tree.

—Charles G.D. Roberts, "Canadian Streams" (1893)

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Elizabeth Bishop, "One Art"

Oh Shenandoah,
I long to hear you
Away you rolling river.
Oh Shenandoah,
I long to hear you,
Away, I'm bound away,
'Cross the wide Missouri.

—"Oh, Shenandoah", American folksong, early 19th century

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Kubla Khan"

I'm gonna find me a river, one that's cold as ice
And when I find me that river, Lord I'm gonna pay the price, oh Lord
I'm goin' down in it three times, but Lord I'm only comin' up twice
She's long gone, and now I'm lonesome blue

—Hank Williams, "Long Gone Lonesome Blues"

These are the days by the sparkling river
His timely grace and our treasured find
This is the love of the one great magician
Turned the water into wine

—Van Morrison, "These are the Days"

I've a garden, a garden of dreams,

Where the cool breeze whispering sways
Softly the apple-sprays,

And from leaves that shimmer and quiver
Down on mine eyelids streams
A slumber-river.

—Sappho, "My Garden"

They have watered the street,
It shines in the glare of lamps,
Cold, white lamps,
And lies
Like a slow-moving river,
Barred with silver and black.

—Amy Lowell, "A London Thoroughfare, 2 a.m."

I get weary and so sick of tryin'
I'm tired of livin', and afraid of dyin'
But Old Man River, he just keeps rollin' along
Old Man River, he just keeps rollin' along

—Oscar Hammerstein Jr. and Jerome Kern, "Old Man River"

I waited
by the river for your pickup
truck to find me. Footprints
scattered in the yellow sand.
Husband, mother-
in-law, kids, wondering
where I'd gone.

—Sandra Cisneros, "I am On My Way..."

Like a river flows surely to the sea
Darling so it goes
some things are meant to be

—Elvis Presley, "I can't stop falling in love..."

the trees sound of a river
birds still hold

while the river bends
visible from the plane
fuming
continues after takeoff

almost a bird answering the dog

—Larry Eigner, "angelic youth"

Pissing in a river, watching it rise
Tattoo fingers shy away from me
Voices voices mesmerize
Voices voices beckoning sea

—Patti Smith, "Pissing in a River"

this is my nostalgia
as it appears
in each river
now it is night
now my life seems to me
a corolla
of shadows

—Giuseppe Ungaretti, "The Rivers"

Sometimes I live in the country,
sometimes I live in town
Sometimes I take a great notion,
to jump in the river and drown.

—Lead Belly, "Goodnight Irene", undated

What small or even maybe meaningful deeds
I might have accomplished
Somewhere
Among strangers,
Coming to them
As only a river can-
Touching every life it meets-
That endlessly kind, that enduring.

—Mary Oliver, "River"

A slow rain sizzles
on the river
like a pan
full of frying flowers,
and with each drop
of rain
the ocean
begins again.

—Richard Brautigan, "The Return of the Rivers"

Masters of civilization, you
Who moved to riverbank from cave,
Putting up tents, and deities,
Though every rivulet wander through
The final, unpolluted glades
To cinder-bank and culvert-lip...

—Carolyn Kizer, "A Muse of Water"

Twenty bridges from Tower to Kew—
Wanted to know what the River knew,
Twenty Bridges or twenty-two,
For they were young, and the Thames was old
And this is the tale that River told...

—Rudyard Kipling, "The River's Tale"

The weight of a man on a woman
is like falling into the river without drowning.

Above, the world is burning and fighting.
Lost worlds flow through others.

But down here beneath water's skin,
river floor, sand, everything

is floating, rocking.

—Linda Hogan, "Two"

If you come down to the river
Bet you gonna find some people who live
You don't have to worry 'cause you have [if you got] no money
People on the river are happy to give

—John Fogerty, "Proud Mary"

We all worship
The river in our own ways, some with stale tortillas
From the Salvation Army, others
With degrees in landscape architecture
From Cal Poly San Luis Obispo.

—Lewis MacAdams, "The River: Books One, Two & Three"

The Styx is the River of Hate
outside of Hell

but

the name

Rio Boredom

would fit more well.

—Michael McClure, *Fragments of Perseus*

Night climbs up to the mountain.
Hunger goes down to the river.

Come with me.

—Pablo Neruda, "The Mountain and the River"

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

—Langston Hughes, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers"

I wish I had a river so long
I would teach my feet to fly
I wish I had a river I could skate away on

—Joni Mitchell, "River"

The river has taken the isles I loved
The keys of silence are lost

—Anne Hébert, "A Small Despair"

What was he doing, the great god Pan,
Down in the reeds by the river ?
Spreading ruin and scattering ban,
Splashing and paddling with hoofs of a goat,
And breaking the golden lilies afloat
With the dragon-fly on the river.

—Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "A Musical Instrument"

Moon River, wider than a mile,
I'm crossing you in style some day.
Oh, dream maker, you heart breaker,
wherever you're going I'm going your way.

—Henry Mancini, Johnny Mercer, "Moon River"

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god - sullen, untamed and intractable,
Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyer of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.

—T.S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages"

O Sleepless as the river under thee,
Vaulting the sea, the prairies' dreaming sod,
Unto us lowliest sometime sweep, descend
And of the curveship lend a myth to God.

—Hart Crane, "To Brooklyn Bridge"

The pale bottom won't hesitate.
He brings what night delivers:
the heart, flooding like a river,
and ourselves, bird-like, wading.

—Sam Hamill, "Crossing the Great River"

Before this grief, mountains must bend down
And rivers stop,
But prison locks are strong,
And behind them are the labor-camp bunks
And the deadly tedium.

—Anna Akhmatova, "Dedication"

Jordan's river is deep and wide, hallelujah.
Meet my mother on the other side, hallelujah.
Jordan's river is chilly and cold, hallelujah.
Chills the body, but not the soul, hallelujah

—Pete Seeger's version, "Michael, Row the Boat Ashore"

Oh baby there ain't no mountain high enough,
Ain't no valley low enough,
Ain't no river wide enough
To keep me from getting to you babe

—Marvin Gaye, "Ain't No Mountain High Enough"

Men no longer weep
by the rivers of Babylon,
but I will speak for you.
If I forget you, may my eyes
lose their Jerusalem.

—Carl Rakosi, "No One Talks About This"

Now I find Japan

more and more Shinto
a faith that makes the mountains
and rivers their gods

—R.G. Everson, "In 1903"

Well I been to London and I been to gay Paree
I followed the river and I got to the sea
I've been down to the bottom of a whirlpool of lies
I ain't lookin' for nothin' in anyone's eyes

—Bob Dylan, "Not Dark Yet"

It is one thing to sing the beloved. Another, alas,
that obscure, guilty river-god of the blood.

—R.M. Rilke, "Third Elegy"

The river awakens.
In the dark of the air
only the river is heard.
Oh, the bitter song
of water over rocks.

—Antonio Machado, "Highland Song"

Our lives are rivers
flowing into the sea,
the sea of dying.

—Jorge Manrique

I was born by the river in a little tent
Oh, and just like the river I've been running ever since

It's been a long, a long time coming
But I know a change gon' come, oh yes it will

—Sam Cooke, "A Change Is Gonna Come"

By the rivers dark
I wandered on
I lived my life
in Babylon

—Leonard Cohen, "By the Rivers Dark"

What the river says, that is what I say.

—William Stafford, "Ask Me"

POETRY BOOKS BY STEPHEN MORRISSEY

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